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## Large-scale solar facilities offer opportunity for West Virginia economic growth

by Darlene J. Swiger STAFF WRITER Mar 5, 2017

Joey James

James

Dimitris Korakakis

Korakakis



Submitted photo

The Amazon Solar Farm U.S. East is located in Accomack County, Virginia.

CLARKSBURG — A new report by Downstream Strategies details significant opportunities for large-scale solar facilities that promote economic development on degraded lands in West Virginia.

Downstream Strategies offers consulting services in a bid to help build resilient communities, promote economic development and protect the environment. The study reveals nearly 220 square miles of degraded land in West Virginia that could host such facilities, which could employ thousands of West Virginians.

The study represents an important step toward attracting this type of renewable energy development to the Mountain State, a type of development that has surged in other states in the region, according to Joey James, project scientist and report lead author.



"The research, funded by the Appalachian Stewardship Foundation, examines five types of degraded land, including previously mined land and Brownfield sites, among others. A total of 1,479 sites were found to be viable for large-scale solar facility development, based on an analysis that included solar irradiation, site size, proximity to roads and transmission lines, land cover and topography," James said.

There were 6,430 sites assessed, with 124 identified in Harrison County; 40 in Barbour; 48 in Marion County; 20 in Taylor; and 40 in Upshur County, he said.

The Appalachian Stewardship Foundation was established as a result of a settlement with Longview Power in Madsville. The foundation was created to mitigate the damage to the environment caused by energy development and use, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to protect freshwater streams and tributaries.

Dimitris Korakakis, a West Virginia University engineering professor with expertise in solar energy, said after reading the report that the degraded land cannot be used for much.

"Putting panels there surely helps, no question about it. One of the strong points against solar energy is the area they take. If that area cannot be used in any other way, that is a good use for the land," Korakakis said. "The Department of Energy shows our region has a yearly average of sun hours of 4 1/2 hours a day vs. 4.75 hours in Florida."

He believes the reasons solar energy is not utilized more in West Virginia range from the political to misconceptions of clouds or mountains making it unfeasible.

"We're just adding to the energy production of the state. We are not in a bad area to take advantage of sun hours available," Korakakis said.

"People may feel threatened by this type of energy. As a state, we need to look into it. If we can make 10 percent more energy, we will have 10 percent more income. We have to take advantage of these renewable opportunities. They are less obtrusive."



The development of large-scale solar facilities on West Virginia's degraded lands represents one opportunity for increased economic activity in the Mountain State, James said.

"Now more than ever, it is important that we capitalize on the growing 21st century energy market and put these lands back to a valuable economic use," he said. "Solar energy development is skyrocketing in neighboring states, bringing with it new investments and jobs. In Virginia, for example, 49 megawatts of solar projects have been installed, an additional 246 megawatts are currently under construction and nearly 3,000

megawatts are under study. By comparison, less than 4 megawatts of solar projects have been built in West Virginia.”

The first large-scale solar project in West Virginia may be built soon by Appalachian Power, which recently released a request for proposals for 25 megawatts of solar projects in West Virginia or Virginia.

“Drastically increasing electricity production from solar panels that harvest energy from the sun for electricity does not require covering West Virginia’s cherished green spaces and valuable agricultural land in solar panels. We can promote this economic opportunity while taking advantage of West Virginia’s abundant degraded spaces,” James said.

For more information, visit [downstreamstrategies.com](http://downstreamstrategies.com).



Staff writer Darlene J. Swiger can be reached at (304) 626-1403 or [dswiger@theet.com](mailto:dswiger@theet.com)

Darlene Swiger

